

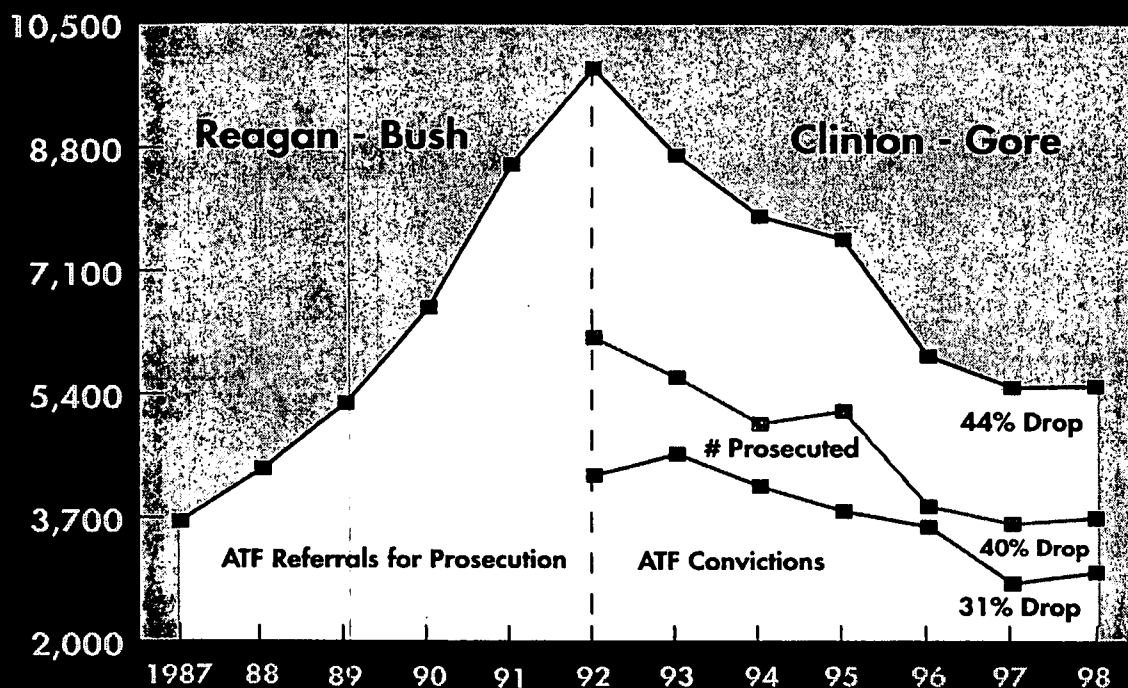
January 27, 2000

### *A Deathbed Conversion???*

## After Seven Years of Neglect, Clinton and Gore Decide to Fight Gun Violence

After years of blocking Republican efforts to lock up criminals who use guns, President Clinton will propose tougher enforcement in his final State of the Union address. According to reports, he will seek \$280 million to hire 300 Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents, 200 ATF inspectors, 100 federal prosecutors, and to help state and local governments hire 1,000 prosecutors. An aide called the proposal "the largest national firearms enforcement initiative in history." It should be: the Clinton-Gore Administration set the fight against gun violence back nearly a decade.

### ATF Gun Referrals, Prosecutions and Convictions



Source: Syracuse University, using ATF and DoJ data

## **Clinton-Gore: An Abysmal Record of Fighting Gun Crime**

ATF is the lead agency in the vast majority of federal firearms prosecutions. Under the Clinton-Gore Administration (1992-1998) ATF referrals to prosecutors of federal firearms violations dropped 44 percent, prosecutions dropped 40 percent, and convictions dropped 31 percent (see graph).

A 14 percent cut in ATF investigators cannot explain the entire drop. According to Syracuse University, "Because the pace of [staff] declines has been much less than the decline in enforcement, *other unknown forces or policy changes are apparently at work*" [emphasis added]. Nor has the decline been offset by longer sentences. "ATF administrators have told reporters that the declines in their enforcement actions are related to improved targeting. More focused prosecutions, however, can reasonably be expected to result in longer prison sentences. This has not been the case" [<http://trac.syr.edu/tracatf/findings/aboutATF/newFindings.html>].

It's not as if the criminals aren't out there. Since November, 1998, the National Instant Check System (NICS) — a Republican initiative — has stopped at least 100,000 people, many of whom are criminals in search of weapons, from purchasing a firearm. Yet the ATF has referred only 200 of these cases — 0.2 percent — for prosecution [Senate Judiciary Committee].

The Administration claims it has increased referrals of firearms cases for state prosecution, but that is the same as giving criminals a bye. State prosecutors have fewer resources than federal prosecutors and state firearms convictions result in shorter sentences. Moreover, with a budget that grew 65 percent from 1992 to 1998, why is the Justice Department dumping its work on the states?

Under the Clinton-Gore Administration, even *convicts* get a bye. Last September, President Clinton granted clemency to 12 terrorists convicted on 36 counts of violating federal firearms law [Congressional Research Service].

## **Republicans Lock Up Criminals With Guns**

Whereas President Clinton has been undermining law enforcement, Republicans are delivering tougher penalties for criminals who use guns. Under Project Exile, a Republican program designed to toughen enforcement, the murder rate in Richmond, Virginia, has dropped 30 percent each year since the program was introduced in 1997 [Senate Judiciary Committee].

Last year in Washington, the battle lines could not have been more clear. President Clinton's fiscal year 2000 budget decreed, "not to exceed \$5,000,000 shall be available for pilot intensive firearms prosecution projects, as part of comprehensive gun violence reduction strategies." Republicans allocated \$7,125,000 — 43 percent more than the President's request.

If President Clinton's deathbed conversion is genuine, he should be applauded. But he will have to demonstrate his sincerity.

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